

An Introduction to Creativity

To many of us, 'creativity' is a mysterious quality that some lucky people are born with. But the truth is everyone is, and can be, creative. Even if you think your mind works in an entirely logical way, there are techniques and approaches you can use to help you think more creatively.

You could define creativity as the ability to meet needs or solve problems in new and inventive ways. When you look at it like this, many of us are actually being creative without even thinking about it.

What are the benefits of creativity?

There are various ways that you and your organisation can benefit from improved levels of creativity. These include:

- **Finding new solutions.** Creativity helps you generate lots of new ideas which can help you and your organisation to deal with change, build strong teams, develop new products and services, improve customer service, and retain talented staff. The more ideas you generate, the more likely you are to find new ways to meet challenges and overcome problems. The possibilities are as endless as your imagination.
- **Minimising frustration.** Improving your creativity means you can drastically reduce the frustration caused by failing to meet challenges or to solve problems at work.
- **Increasing productivity.** The right creativity tools and techniques can help you and your organisation to generate ideas and solve problems faster, making you more effective, productive and fulfilled.

When can I use creativity?

Creativity can be particularly useful for **generating ideas** and for **problem-solving** at work. When your usual response, or organisational guidelines, suggest a particular course of action, pause for just a moment and consider whether there might be an alternative way.

Generating ideas

There are all sorts of techniques available, e.g. brainstorming and mind mapping, to help you think more creatively and innovatively. By this we mean:

- setting aside assumptions about how particular challenges or problems should be approached, e.g. just because that's the way you're always done something, does that make it the best way?
- taking new perspectives and being open to new ways of doing things in your day-to-day work. Think back to the last time you did something, did anyone suggest another way, or did you receive any feedback?
- looking for new ways to create value for your organisation. Think about any competitors or rivals your organisation has. What do they do differently, what is it about them that you admire? Could you adapt this to your organisation?
- listening to, respecting, and incorporating other people's suggestions and ideas into your thinking.

Problem-solving

The secret of using creativity to solve problems is to avoid the temptation of looking at how you tackled similar challenges in the past. Instead, try to re-formulate your thoughts. You can do this by:

1. **Re-defining your problem.** Before you start, make sure it's the problem and not the symptoms you're trying to solve. Ask yourself why the problem exists, and spend time getting to the bottom of it. It's also important to be clear about what you're trying to achieve, and any constraints that exist. If the problem is a particularly large one, break it down into smaller parts, and deal with these one at a time. When you have thought the problem through thoroughly, try summarising the problem in a couple of words if possible, to really focus your mind.
2. **Open your mind.** Once you're really clear about the problem, start generating possible solutions. Remember to try to think about ways of doing something out with the normal approach. You will find a variety of creativity techniques throughout this unit to help you do this. Avoid the temptation to immediately go with your first idea. It may or may not be your best idea, but by considering a number of alternative options first you may come up with something better. If you do go back to your original idea you can be sure that you've considered all the other options. Try not to pass judgment on any of your ideas until you have come up with as many as you can, and then revisit them all with an open mind.
3. **Identify the best solution.** Once you have a number of possible solutions, choose the best one by weighing up

the pros and cons of each. There might be an obvious choice, but if not, you may wish to ask others for their input to help you decide.

4. **Implement your solution.** The final stage of creative problem-solving is to transform your solution into action. Without this final stage, your creative efforts will have been wasted. It is useful, therefore, to draw up an action plan to help you implement your chosen solution.

Where should I start?

Being creative doesn't have to mean having big original ideas. It can be something as simple as contributing to a suggestion scheme with your ideas on trying something new or doing something better in your department.

What's more, brand new ideas are few and far between. Most of the time new ideas are created by putting together existing ones in new and original ways. Think about email. It's really just a combination of the letter, the wordprocessor and a modem. But what has resulted is something that has changed the way that people around the world communicate with each other.

Look around you for inspiration. What are other teams, departments, or industries doing that you could 'steal' creatively? The interesting and original concept a rival has come up with could well be adapted and moulded for your purposes.

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